

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 1918

FOR EUR: GEORGE VEST FROM AMBASSADOR BYRNE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: CZ, CSCE, US
SUBJECT: OFFICIAL-INFORMAL

1. SENATOR MCGOVERN VISITED PRAGUE JULY 14-16. HE MET WITH VASIL BILAK, THE NUMBER TWO MAN IN THE CZECHOSLOVAK CP HIERARCHY, FOR NEARLY THREE HOURS, AND SAW OTHER OFFICIALS AS WELL. FROM EMBASSY'S POINT OF VIEW, VISIT WAS MORE THAN SATISFACTORY AND POSSIBLY HELPFUL IN THE LONG RUN. THE SENATOR TOLD ME HE INTENDS TO MEET WITH YOU SOON TO DISCUSS HIS VISIT, PARTICULARLY THE CLAIMS/GOLD ISSUE.

2. VASIL BILAK RECEIVED THE SENATOR AT THE FEDERAL ASSEMBLY IN HIS CAPACITY AS A MEMBER OF THAT BODY'S PRESIDUM. AFTER A GENERAL DISCUSSION OF EAST-WEST RELATIONS AND OF THE CURRENT STRAIN IN SOVIET-AMERICAN TIES, BILAK ROUNDLY DENOUNCED THE ADMINISTRATION'S HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY AND DISMISSED THE CZECH DISSIDENTS AS "TROTSKYITES AND FANATICS". SENATOR MCGOVERN COUNTERED WITH EXAMPLES OF THE SALUBRIOUS EFFECT OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CRITICISM. BILAK WAS UNCONVINCED.

3. ON CLAIMS/GOLD, BILAK AGAIN TOOK THE POSITION THAT THE RETURN OF THE GOLD WAS OUR "MORAL DUTY". BUT BILAK BECAME FAR MORE CONCILIATORY AND APPEARED FOR THE
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MOMENT TO BE TURNING THE DISCUSSION INTO A NEGOTIATION AFTER SENATOR MCGOVERN ENCOURAGED BILAK TO VIEW THE PROBLEM IN THE SENATE AS "PRACTICAL, POLITICAL ONE," WHICH MIGHT BE SOLVED WITH A SOMEWHAT HIGHER OFFER BY THE CZECHOSLOVAK SIDE, PERHAPS 50 PER CENT OF THE VALUE OF THE CLAIMS. BILAK REFLECTING ON THE SUGGESTION REPLIED THAT THE MATTER WAS CERTAINLY IN THE REALM OF COMPROMISE

BUT SHORTLY THEREAFTER DILUTED HIS TALK OF COMPROMISE BY SUGGESTING THAT THE TERM OF PAYMENT BE UPPED FROM THIRTEEN YEARS AND SOMEHOW LINKED TO TRADE. HE ALSO REMINDED THE SENATOR THAT TWO PREVIOUS "COMMITMENTS" HAD BEEN BROKEN AFTER THE AGREEMENTS HAD BEEN INITIALED BY THE U.S. NEGOTIATORS. HE CONCLUDED ON AN UPBEAT NOTE BY STATING THAT THE INITIATIVE SHOULD COME FROM THE U.S. SINCE HE COULD GIVE NO ANSWER "TODAY", WHICH SEEMINGLY APPLIED EQUALLY TO THE SENATOR'S FIFTY PER CENT PROPOSAL AND TO HIS OFFER TO BE HELPFUL IN ENCOURAGING SOME OF HIS COLLEAGUES IN THE SENATE TO SUPPORT SUCH A SETTLEMENT SHOULD BILAK WANT HIS HELP. AT DINNER THAT EVENING ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER JABLONSKY WHO HAD BEEN VERY QUICKLY BRIEFED ON THE MCGOVERN-BILAK SESSION BY ZANTOVSKY, ONE OF HIS SUBORDINATES, TOOK PAINS TO TELL ME THAT IN EFFECT, BILAK'S WORDS SHOULD NOT BE READ AS SUGGESTING THERE IS ANY REAL GIVE IN GOC POSITION. HOWEVER, THIS MORNING AFTER MEETING WITH JABLONSKY ON OUR CSCE DEMARCHE ON THE SOVIET TRIALS, HE TOLD ME THAT AFTER A FULL BRIEFING HE WAS DELIGHTED TO LEARN THAT BILAK HAD BEEN ENCOURAGING A SETTLEMENT BY HIS INDICATION THAT GOC HAD SOME FLEXIBILITY AND HOPED THAT MCGOVERN REFLECTED AN EQUALLY STRONG U.S. DESIRE TO REACH A SETTLEMENT. HE REPEATED BILAK'S HOPE THAT WE WOULD HAVE A PROPOSAL SOON.

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4. JOURNALISTS: THE SENATOR ARGUED ELOQUENTLY FOR BETTER COOPERATION WITH JOURNALISTS, BILLING HIS PRESENTATION AS "FREE POLITICAL ADVISE" WHICH FIDEL CASTRO HAD EARLIER HEEDED AND PROFITED BY. BILAK APPEARED INTERESTED BUT UNMOVED AND COUNTERED WITH NUMEROUS COMPLAINTS ABOUT CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S BAD PRESS.

5. EXCHANGES AGREEMENT: ALTHOUGH THE EXCHANGES AGREEMENT WAS MENTIONED DURING BILAK MEETING ONLY IN PASSING AS ONE "SMALL STEP" TOWARDS IMPROVING RELATIONS, AT DINNER GIVEN BY NATIONAL FRONT DEPUTY CHAIRMAN TRAVNICEK IT GOT MORE ATTENTION. TRAVNICEK EXPRESSED HIS STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE U.S.-CZECHOSLOVAK AGREEMENT, AND SENATOR MCGOVERN SUGGESTED THAT A SEMINAR ON NUTRITION AND FITNESS IN WHICH BOTH HE AND TRAVNICEK WOULD PARTICIPATE, MIGHT BE CONSIDERED UNDER SUCH AN AGREEMENT. ALTHOUGH THERE WAS DISCUSSION OF VISIT BY CSSR PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION TO WASHINGTON, THE SENATOR WAS NOT FORTHCOMING, AND LATER CONFIDED TO ME THAT HE WOULD WANT TO CLEAR ANYTHING OF THIS SORT WITH SENATOR BYRD AND THE SENATE LEADERSHIP. IN OUR CLASSIFIED BRIEFING SESSION EARLIER IN THE DAY THE SENATOR SAID

HE THOUGHT EXCHANGES AGREEMENT WAS THE SORT OF THING THAT
WE SHOULD TRY TO GO FORWARD WITH IN SPITE OF DIFFERENCES
WITH GOC OVER HUMAN RIGHTS, ETC. HE DOUBTED IT WOULD
ATTRACT MUCH ADVERSE COMMENT IN CONGRESS.

6. THE ABOVE WAS NOT CLEARED WITH SENATOR, BUT I
WANTED YOU TO HAVE A FLAVOR OF HIS VISIT AS SOON AS
POSSIBLE. WE WILL BE POUCHING THE SENATOR A DETAILED
MEMCON ON THE BILAK MEETING THIS WEEK.
BYRNE

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